DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 086 PS 021 135

AUTHOR Donate-Bartfield, Evelyn L.; Passman, Richard H.
TITLE Security Blankets and Children's Security of Attachment to Their Mothers.
PUB DATE 15 Aug 92
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (100th, Washington, DC, August 14-18, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; *Mothers; *Parent Child Relationship; *Security (Psychology); *Separation Anxiety; Stranger Reactions; *Toddlers
IDENTIFIERS Ainsworth Strange Situation Procedure; *Security Blankets

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relations between toddlers' degree of attachment to their mothers and their development of an attachment to a security blanket. Seventy-four 18-month-olds were separated from their mothers three times; the third time the toddlers were left for 5 minutes in an unfamiliar playroom with their blanket and with a stranger. The children's response to their blankets, the amount of time they opted to stay in the playroom, and mothers' ratings of the children's attachment to their blankets were used to determine children's security of maternal attachment and level of attachment to a security blanket. Results showed no correlations between attachment to mother and the development of an attachment to a blanket. However, results did show a correlation between the time spent with the blanket in strange surroundings and the child's degrees of attachment to the mother and to the blanket. Blanket-attached, mother-avoidant children spent the most time with the blanket; blanket-indifferent, mother-attached children spent the least amount of time with blankets. The study indicated that attachments to blankets and to mothers originate independently. It is proposed that children use their attachment to blankets differently depending on the level of their attachment to their mothers. (ME)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED354086

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Security Blankets and Children's Security of Attachment to Their Mothers

Evelyn L. Donate-Bartfield and Richard H. Passman

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, August 15, 1992

PS 02135

Abstract

Are attachments to security objects and to mothers related? After assessment in Ainsworth's Strange Situation, 74 18-month olds were left alone with a stranger and their blanket. Although mothers' ratings of blanket attachment were unrelated to children's security of attachment to their mothers, avoidantly and securely attached children reacted differently depending on level of blanket attachment. MANOVA on six measures showed that blanket-attached avoidant children adjusted better while separated from mothers than did blanket-nonattached avoidant, -attached secure, and -nonattached secure children. Blanket-attached avoidant children used their blanket to help resolve conflict experienced from avoiding their mother.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard H. Passman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Security Blankets and Children's Security of Attachment to their Mothers

Do children who are attached to security objects have positive or negative relations with their mother? Because blanket attachments occur relatively often in cultures where the mother and child are frequently separated, some writers have argued that children may become attached to objects as compensation for inadequate parenting (e.g., Hong, 1978). Ainsworth (1978), however, stated that attachment to objects can occur only when attachment to the primary caretaker is positive. Likewise, learning theorists have noted functional similarities between blankets and mothers (e.g., Gewirtz, 1972), and some have posited that blanket attachments result at least partially from stimulus generalization. Strong maternal attachments must therefore exist for blanket attachments to generalize from them. A third alternative, consonant with other learning-theory principles and with the findings of Passman (1987), is that blanket and mother attachments are unrelated. The blanket is a discriminative stimulus and conditioned reinforcer that has been paired with other reinforcers in the child's environment, independently of any attachment to the mother (Gewirtz, 1972).

If blanket attachments result from poor mother-child bonds, children classified as insecurely attached to their mother in the Ainsworth Strange Situation should have attachments to blankets.

If close mother-child ties are responsible, children securely attached to their mother should have blanket attachments. If the two develop independently, no relation should be found.

The standard procedure for assessment in the Strange Situation (interobserver reliability = .86) required that the 74 18-month olds be separated twice from their mother. Immediately afterward, they were separated a third time when they were left in a novel playroom for 5 min with a stranger and their blanket. A point-biserial correlation revealed no significant association between mothers' ratings of blanket attachment and the child's security of maternal attachment (secure or avoidant, with 5 resistant children omitted from analyses), r (67) = .11, p >.10. However, MANOVA on six measures of play, exploration, and comfort in the playroom (interobserver reliabilities = .85 - .99) yielded a reliable interaction, $F(6, 53) = 3.02$, p <.05: Children securely and avoidantly attached to their mother behaved differently depending on their level of blanket attachment. Children attached to their blanket but avoidantly attached to their mother stayed in the playroom significantly longer and responded within it more than did blanket-nonattached avoidant, blanket-attached secure, and blanket-nonattached secure children (who more readily left to return to their mother). The quality of maternal attachment was thus not associated with <u>developing</u> attachments to blankets; however, it was reliably related to the

extent to which the children used their blanket as a mechanism for remaining apart from the mother.

The finding that type of maternal attachment was unrelated to the development of blanket attachment is inconsistent with arguments by advocates for inadequate parenting, close mother-child ties, or stimulus generalization alone as the cause for blanket attachments. The results instead indicate that blanket and mother attachments develop independently (Gewirtz, 1972; Passman, 1987).

Attachments to mothers, however, did determine how the blanket was used when children were attached to it. Securely attached children's behavior may be understood in light of the stress engendered by the multiple separations in the Ainsworth and playroom procedures. Because blankets lose some effectiveness with high stress (Passman, 1987), both blanket-attached and -nonattached children with secure maternal attachments essentially had a choice between staying with a relatively ineffective blanket or going to the secure mother who usually provides comfort during stress. Therefore, they resisted playing and exploring in the playroom and instead left to return to her.

The resolution for maternally avoidant children was more complicated. Approaching their mother, who had been associated with insensitive caretaking and rejection (Main & Weston, 1982), might produce some conflict, yet stress created by the

experimental procedures likely induced a need for proximity (Main & Weston, 1982). Despite such ambivalence, avoidant blanket-nonattached children sought their mother rather than remaining with a blanket that was intrinsically meaningless for them. Maternally avoidant blanket-attached children, however, could remain with their blanket--even though stress diminished some of its security-giving properties--rather than experience conflict from approaching their mother.

Although blanket and mother attachments originate independently, those children who are blanket attached may be using blankets differently depending on their tie to the mother. For avoidant children, the blanket may serve as an ideal means for shifting attention away from the mother (cf. Main & Weston, 1982). Distinctions must therefore be made between development of blanket attachments and how blankets are used.

References

Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1978). The Bowlby-Ainsworth attachment theory. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3, 436-438.

Gewirtz, J.L. (1972). Attachment, dependence, and a distinction in terms of stimulus control. In J.L. Gewirtz (Ed.), Attachment and dependency (pp. 139-177). Washington, DC: Winston.

Hong, K. (1978). The transitional phenomena: A theoretical integration. Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 33, 47-79.

Main, M., & Weston, D.R. (1982). Avoidance of the attachment figure in infancy: Descriptions and interpretations. In C.M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), The place of attachment in human behavior (pp. 31-59). New York: Basic.

Passman, R.H. (1987). Attachments to inanimate objects: Are children who have security blankets insecure? Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55, 825-830.